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ABSTRACT

Formulaic speech, expressions learned as unanalyzed wholes and used on particular occasions by native speakers, is contrasted to "grammatical" sentences using novel combinations of words in the second language classroom. The speech produced by three limited English-speaking children in an English program suggests that formulaic speech enables learners of English as a second language (ESL) to perform a number of important communicative functions in the classroom. These functions contribute directly or indirectly to the learner's acquisition of rules for producing novel sentences. It is concluded that in the early stages of second language development, formulaic speech may be more significant than creative rules, and that in planning ESL programs for beginners, teachers should think about which formulas will be of most use to the students and watch for opportunities to naturally introduce and practice them. (MSE)

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Formulaic Speech in Early Classroom Second Language Development[1]

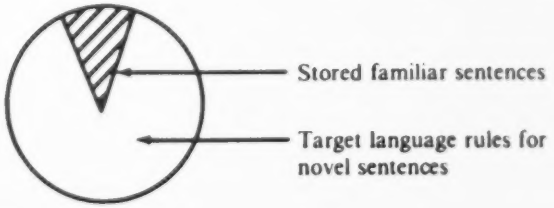
Rod Ellis

INTRODUCTION

Formulaic speech consists of "expressions which are learned as unanalysable wholes and employed on particular occasions by native speakers" (Lyons, 1968:177). Examples given by Lyons are "How do you do?" and proverbs such as "Easy come and easy go." The main characteristic of such utterances is that "their internal structure, unlike that of genuine sentences, is not accounted for by means of rules which specify the permissable combinations of words" (Lyons, 1968:177). In other words formulaic expressions and grammatical sentences are alternative ways of expressing meaning. Steinberg (1982) captures this rather nicely by referring to these alternative means as *familiar sentences* and *novel sentences* respectively.

Formulaic speech is not uncommon in native-speaker speech, but it is, probably, even more common in the speech of second language (L2) learners. Referring to native-speaker speech Lyons considers formulaic speech relatively infrequent compared to "the vast mass of more *normal* utterances" (Lyons: 177). The competence of native speakers, therefore, can be represented as in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Native-speaker linguistic competence



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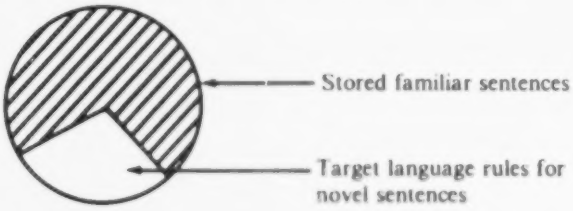
[1]I would like to thank Jean Handscombe for helpful comments on the earlier draft of this paper.

In contrast L2 learners in the early stages of development know relatively few target language (TL) rules for either reception or production and so their linguistic competence must be characterised by a much larger proportion of stored formulaic speech, as represented in Figure 2. One of the major aims of this paper is to illustrate the importance of formulaic speech in the early L2 acquisition of learners in an ESL classroom.

Figure 2: Early L2 speaker linguistic competence



There are three issues relating to formulaic speech in L2 acquisition that I wish to examine. The first concerns the extent to which it occurs in the early speech of ESL learners. The frequency of formulaic speech in L2 performance is generally recognised. Formulaic speech figures prominently in the early acquisition of English by young children in informal environments (Huang and Hatch, 1978; Hakuta, 1974; Wagner-Gough, 1975; Fillmore, 1976) and also by adults (Hanania and Gradman, 1977; Huebner, 1980). However, all these studies describe naturalistic acquisition. I shall consider the different kinds of formulaic speech used by three classroom learners.

The second issue concerns the role of formulaic speech in L2 development. Any consideration of this issue involves both the contribution of formulaic speech to learner *performance* and to the *acquisition* of the creative rule system. It is important to keep these separate. Thus it is possible to conclude that formulaic speech contributes positively to the learner's productive capacity but plays no part in the development of the rule system. On the basis of this separation it is possible to formulate a strong position regarding the contribution of formulaic speech (i.e. it aids *both* performance and acquisition) and a weak position (i.e. it aids *only* performance). Even if the weak position is adopted, however, I believe a convincing case can be made out for allocating formulaic speech an important role in the L2 development of ESL learners, particularly in the beginning stages.

There is general acceptance that L2 performance is aided and enhanced by formulaic speech. Krashen (1982) argues that it serves, like the use of the mother tongue, as a means of "outperforming competence." For Krashen "ability to peform" and "competence" are distinct, the latter relating solely to knowledge of the creative rule system. Krashen accepts, however, that L2 users need to communicate beyond the means provided by their competence and thus accepts that formulaic speech has a role, albeit a limited one, to play. It can improve overall performance both by compensating for deficiencies in knowledge of the creative rule system and also by helping to solve production difficulties. A reasonable hypothesis is that

utterances produced with reference to their underlying rule system take longer to process than when they are produced as wholes. Thus formulaic speech is useful to the language performer because it relieves the burden placed on the processing mechanisms. This point is skilfully put by Steinberg (1982: 123):

> The fact that speakers are able to produce and understand sentences at the fantastic rate they do could never be explained, if we suppose that every sentence had to be constructed through application of all related rules.

Thus, *familiar phrases and sentences* facilitate processing by making available direct meaning-bond associations.

Steinberg's comments refer to native-speaker performance. The need for processing relief in L2 speaker performance is that much greater. Thus the extent to which learners use formulaic speech may be the function of three factors:

(1) The user's need to *outperform competence*.
(2) The degree of automaticity of acquired TL rules.
(3) The degree of pressure placed on the processing mechanisms by the type of discourse the learner is engaging in (i.e. the more unplanned the discourse type, the greater the need for ready-made utterances).

There is no concensus regarding the nature and the extent of the contribution made by formulaic speech to the *acquisition* of the creative rule system. Two basic positions are held. The first states that formulaic speech and rule-created speech are unrelated. The following might be considered as evidence for this position:

(1) In the initial stages of language development formulaic speech is by definition unrelated to rule-created speech i.e., formulaic speech contains structural elements which are not evident in propositional speech.
(2) There is neurological evidence from cases of left hemispherectomy of patients who lose the ability to speak but are nevertheless still able to produce automatic speech consisting of stereotyped expressions (Krashen and Scarcella, 1978). It has been suggested that formulaic speech might be represented in the right hemisphere and creative speech in the left.
(3) The fact that native-speakers continue to make extensive use of formulaic utterances indicates that these may be protected from analysis throughout the period of language acquisition. Thus a common utterance such as "What's this?" could be derived in two different ways—from the store of formulaic utterances available to the speaker and from the store of creative rules. Which way is followed may simply reflect the amount of processing time available in different situations.

The alternative position—that adopted by Clark (1974) in the case of first language acquisition and Fillmore (1976) in L2 acquisition—is that formulaic utterances are eventually analysed into their component parts and thereby contribute to the learner's creative rule system. In a way this proposal confers the analytical skills of the linguist on the language learner.

The third issue to be examined in this paper concerns the role of formulaic speech in teaching. The traditional focus of language teaching is grammar i.e. the creative rule system. This has been the case whether the linguistic theory on which the teaching is based has been structural/behavioural, transformational/mentalist

or communicative/interactionist and whether the language teaching methodology has been inductive, deductive or communicative. The centrality of grammar in language teaching is evident in the vast majority of methods currently employed in the teaching of second or foreign languages including so called *humanistic* methods (for example, Curran, 1976) and those linked with the notional/functional approach (for example, Wilkins, 1976) as well as, more obviously, traditional audiolingual methods. I wish to suggest that grammar might not be as important as formulaic speech in at least the early L2 development of some ESL learners and that emphasis placed on developing grammatical rules may be misplaced with such beginners.

To summarise, the three issues I wish to consider are the uses of formulaic utterances in the speech of L2 beginners, the role that formulaic speech plays in L2 development and the extent to which it should be incorporated into a teaching programme. The focus will be on ESL classroom learners.

TYPES OF FORMULAIC SPEECH

It is not easy to distinguish speech consisting of familiar sentences from speech consisting of novel sentences. Huang and Hatch (1978) discuss this problem of identification and point to a number of criteria that might be used. "Imitated sentences" (their term for formulaic speech) are grammatical, the learner displays no awareness of smaller units within the sentences and there is no recombination of words or morphemes into sentences. These are the criteria that will be applied in the following analysis.

Formulaic speech can be classified in terms of both functional and formal categories. Functional descriptions are possible because each formulaic utterance is typically associated with a specific illocutionary meaning. Thus Garvey (1977: 43) notes formulaic speech consists of "predictable utterance sequences that serve a single or limited role, and are restricted to particular positions or specialized functions in respect to conversation or interaction." Perhaps the most complete functional taxonomy of formulaic speech is provided by Yorio (1980). He distinguishes the following functional types:

(1) *Situation formulas*
formulaic utterances associated with a specific situation ("I thought you'd never ask")
(2) *Stylistic formulas*
formulaic utterances associated with a particular style ("Ladies and gentlemen. . . .")
(3) *Ceremonial formulas*
formulaic utterances used in ritualistic interactions (different forms of address)
(4) *Gambits*
formulaic utterances used to organise interactions or activities. They can be *conversational* ("Guess what!") and *organisational* ("Let's call it a day").
(5) *Euphemisms*

In a formal description of formulaic speech it is useful to distinguish *routines* and *patterns* (Krashen and Scarcella, 1978). Routines refer to whole utterances that are used as unanalysed packages. They can consist of words, phrases or sentences but are probably stored in the same way because they lack internal structure.

Patterns are only partially unanalysed. They include one or more *open* slots in a fixed frame. The existence of patterns suggests that formulaic and creative speech may not be dichotomous but polar ends of a continuum on which utterances can be placed that are more or less formulaic/creative.

The notion of formulaic speech, however, need not be restricted to single utterances. It can also refer to discourse stretches that are highly predictable because they are dependent on specific, easily identifiable contexts. An obvious example might be a greeting sequence. This particular interpretation of formulaic speech is similar to the concept of *script* used in first language acquisition research. Nelson and Gruendel (1979), for instance, suggest that children develop *scripts* or regular routines. That is, they form a conceptual representation of a sequence of interactive events, which is stored in long-term memory and then activated in appropriate contexts. L2 learners may also work out scripts which correspond to their communicative needs and which they can easily *lock* into.

Formulaic speech, then, can be described in terms of the communicative functions it serves. Formally it is possible to distinguish routines, patterns and scripts.

METHOD

The data used in this study of formulaic speech in a classroom context were taken from the speech produced by three children during their first year of learning English in a Language Unit in London.

The three children were *J*, an eleven year old Portuguese boy, *R* an eleven year old Pakistani boy and his sister, *T*, who was thirteen years old. At the beginning of the study *J* knew almost no English and *R* and *T* none whatsoever. The two boys had outgoing personalities, but the girl was more withdrawn. *J* mixed with children from other ethnic groups from the start and so was forced to try to use English to communicate with them. In contrast, *R* and *T* spent most of their time both in and out of the classroom with other Punjabi speaking children and so did not need to use English so much. Initially, however, all three children (and in particular the two Pakistani children) were subject to considerable social distancing from a native English speaking community and so were reliant on the environment provided by the Language Unit for an input of English. Once they left the Unit they had no contact with English. Thus, although the three learners acquired English in an ESL situation, they were in many respects in a similar learning context to that which faces EFL learners.

The Language Unit they were sent to functioned as a reception school for recently arrived non-English speaking children. Children were withdrawn from the secondary school at which they initially registered until they had achieved sufficient competence in English to take part in the normal school curriculum. The Unit provided tuition in English but also taught other school subjects such as Maths and Science through the medium of English. English also functioned as the medium of communication in all other school affairs (such as assembly, sports, concerts). Thus the children were exposed to English both inside and outside the classroom.

The children were visited by the researcher on a regular weekly basis during term time. This involved a minimum of one visit per week and often three or more. The procedure followed was to sit in the classes containing the three children and to keep a pencil and paper record of (1) each utterance they produced and (2) the verbal

and non-verbal context of each utterance. This method of collecting data was supplemented by audio-recordings. These were often *noisy* as a result of the informal teaching style that prevailed in the classrooms, but provided some useful additional data and also served as a means of verifying the pencil and paper records. In general the presence of a researcher in the classroom did not appear to unduly affect the kind of language produced by the three children. The data that were collected can be considered representative of the kind of language that occurs in withdrawal ESL classrooms.

The corpus used for the study was the *communicative* speech produced by the three children that is, the speech produced when the focus was on meaning rather than form. Excluded were the utterances that occurred during language practice when the underlying purpose was pedagogic rather than communicative. The majority of the utterances produced by the three learners consisted of communicative rather than pedagogic speech. This corpus was carefully inspected and a limited number of formulaic utterances identified using the criteria outlined by Huang and Hatch (1978), already referred to.

RESULTS

Formulaic speech in classroom communication

All three children appeared to rapidly develop a number of formulaic utterances which they used to help them communicate in the everyday activities of classroom interaction. Figure 3 lists some of the most common, using the functional framework provided by Yorio (1980)

Figure 3: Examples of formulaic speech produced by three child classroom learners

Type of formula	Examples
(1) Situation formulas	"Finished" (said after completing a classroom task) "I got none/one/two" etc (referring to the points won in a game) "Very good" (self-congratulating in a game or classroom task)
(2) Stylistic formulas	"Can I have rubber/colour" etc? (requesting goods from teacher or pupil)
(3) Ceremonial formuals	"How are you?" (greeting) "Good morning?" (greeting) "Excuse me, miss/sir" (attracting attention)
(4) Gambits	"This one or this one?" (identifying nature of a task) "What's this?" (asking for object to be identified) "I don't know" (lack of knowledge or ability to respond) "That's all right" (confirming course of action)

Below is a discussion of two of the most commonly used formulaic utterances, which sheds further light on the role played by such utterances in classroom communication.

"I don't know"
This is an example of a *routine*. It was very common in the speech of *R* and *T* but less so in *J's*, although this may simply reflect a bias in the data gathering. The routine was particularly evident in situations where the teacher was questioning an individual pupil, perhaps because a failure to respond was more conspicuous and so less acceptable. "I don't know" served an important discourse function; it helped to fill a turn. In many cases the children's use of the routine was ambiguous. It could be used to indicate that the learner had failed to understand what the teacher had said, or that, despite understanding, the learner could not provide an answer. But its main function seemed to be to take up a discourse slot when the learner felt obliged to take a turn but could not contribute to the propositional development of the conversation. *R* and *T* only use "don't" in the context of this routine for a long time but *J* also used "don't" monomorphemically as an alternative to "not" in directives.

"Can I have _____, please?"
This is an example of a *pattern*. It was used to request goods in the classroom, but it was not the only means of performing this function. Other devices were also used such as:

Colours, sir. (*R*)
Give me one pencil. (*J*)

The empty slot in the pattern was filled by lexical items referring to a range of classroom objects—rubber, pencil, pen, paper, book, paint etc. The auxiliary "can" made its first appearance in this pattern, which was also unique in other ways. It manifested subject-verb inversion when no other utterance produced by the children did so, it made use of only the first person pronoun and it was restricted to the verb "have". It is interesting to note that the almost identical pattern for requesting permission ("Can I _____?") did not occur in the data until much later for *J* and not at all in the first year for *R* and *T*. Apparently the formula was not so much a *form* for the children as a device for performing a specific language *function*.

A rather different kind of communicative role was played by the learners' use of *scripts*. These were more likely to occur in teacher-pupil rather than teacher-class interaction. When the learners were faced with a verbal task that they could not manage, they tended to switch into a familar set of responses which they felt competent to perform. In other words, scripts were used as a means of escaping from communicative pressure imposed by the teacher. *R* was particularly prone to this kind of behaviour (Ellis, 1983). One of his scripts, a colour-identification sequence, is illustrated below. The teacher was showing *R* a "What's Wrong" Picture of a bicycle without any pedals.

T. I want you to tell me what you can see in the picture or what's wrong with the picture. Look at that.

R. /pɔi k/ (= bike

T. A cycle, yes.
But what's wrong.

R. /rɛt/ (= red)

[2]Phonetic transcription was used whenever a learner utterance was conspicuously different in pronunciation from a British English model.

T. It's red, yes.
What's wrong with it?

R. Black

T. Black. Good.

In this example the teacher's conceptualisation of the task and *R's* script do not match. Although *R's* responses are contextually appropriate to the picture, they do not satisfy the teacher's question. The result is what Keenan and Schieffelin (1977) call "discontinuous discourse." On other occasions, however, the learners' use of scripts produced more successful outcomes.

Later Development of Formulaic Utterances

In both first and second language acquisition research it has been suggested that formulaic speech serves as the basis for creative speech. The learner first comes to realise that the formulaic utterances he initially understood and used as unanalysed wholes consist of discrete constituents which can be combined with other constituents in a variety of rule-bound ways. Clark (1974) gives a number of examples of routine "unproductive sequences" which were rapidly used in the construction of more complex utterances by a child learning English as a first language.

The new structures were the result of juxtaposing existing routines or of embedding one within another. Clark felt that the child's speech became creative predominantly through the gradual analysis of the internal structure of sequences which started off as routines. Fillmore (1976;1979) has taken a very similar position for L2 acquisition. Her research is particularly relevant to this study as her subjects were also school children (aged 5.7 to 7.3 years), but her data were not collected from within the classroom. Fillmore documents a large number of formulas and suggests that over time they are submitted to an analytical process that releases constituent elements for use in other *slots* than those they initially occupied. She suggests that analysis can occur in two ways; by the learner noticing variation in the formulaic structure according to the situation and also by the learner noticing similarities in parts of one set of formulas with those of others. As the constituent elements become freed the learners' utterances become rule-based. However, other commentators have argued that formulaic speech and the development of rule-created speech are unrelated (for example, Krashen and Scarcella, 1978; see p. 3-4 of this paper).

In order to investigate to what extent the formulas produced by the three classroom learners were converted into rules, as described by Clark and Fillmore, the "I don't know" routine was examined developmentally.

In tracing the developmental route of "I don't know" the following structural features were considered:

(1) when "don't" was first used in similar but different expressions
(2) when an alternative subject to "I" first occurred
(3) when "know" was released for use without "don't"
(4) when an additional constituent first occurred.

Figure 4 gives the first instance and the week of its occurence of each of these developments in the communicative classroom speech of the three children.

Figure 4: The later development of the "I don't know" routine

Developmental features	*J*	*R*	*T*
"don't" used in similar but different expressions	"I don't understand" (14)	"I don't like holiday" (22)	"I don't like this book" (26)
Alternative subject to "I"	"You don't know where it is" (21)		
"know" used without "don't"	"I know this" (18)	"I know five" (26)	"I know this one" (28)
Additional constituents	"I don't know that big one" (18)	"I don't know this one" (24)	"I don't know this" (18)

When "don't" first appeared in structures other than "I don't know" its use was still very restricted. There is no immediate release followed by productive use with a range of different verbs. It is, in fact, quite likely that the new forms ("I don't understand" for *J* and "I don't like" for *R* and *T*) were still routines and that it was only when the learners perceived the syntactic similarity between the two routines that completely productive use of "don't" became possible. However, the data for the first year suggest that this point was not reached by any of the children.

Only *J* developed the ability to replace "I" with an alternative pronoun. This was a reflection of his more rapid overall development. His speech also manifested each developmental feature at an earlier date.

For all three children the ability to use "know" independently of "don't" was subsequent to their ability to use "don't" with other verbs. One interpretation of this would be that "don't" is analysed for productive use before "know", but this would assume that the other "don't" utterances are rule-derived rather than routines. What is more significant is that "I don't know" preceded the structurally simpler "I know" by as much as six months. This is surely a reflection of the comparative importance of the communicative uses of the two structures. In the classroom children prize the ability to express ignorance over the ability to express knowledge! Pupils need a defensive strategy to ward off the teachers' questions from the start.

The most interesting of the developmental features is the use of additional constituents with "I don't know", that is when the routine turned into a pattern. The data show a remarkable similarity with those provided by Clark. Here are some further examples taken from the speech of the three children with the juxtaposed structure italicized. The number in brackets refers to the week in which each utterance was observed.

(1) *That one* I don't know. (J - 21)
(2) I don't know *what's this*. (R - 26)
(3) I don't know *what's this*. (T - 25)
(4) I don't know *"holiday" spelling*. (T - 22)

(5) You don't know *where it is*. (J - 25)
(6) I don't know *how to play*. (J - 27)
(7) I don't know *what is squirrel*. (R - 24)
(8) I don't know *making*. (T - 30)

These are worth discussing in some detail as they reveal at least two different strategies. One of these consists of combining two routines into a single utterance. Definite examples of this strategy are (1), (2) and (3). (4) is also probably the product of this combination strategy, as "noun + spelling" served as a common device for requesting assistance with written work. (5) and (6) may also represent the conjunction of two routines, although *where it is* and *how to play* could also be rule-derived constituents. (7) and (8), however, reflect a totally different strategy. In both cases the learner incorporated a consitituent from the teacher's previous utterance, attaching it as a single, unanalysed unit to an existing routine. This is an example of what Scollon (1976) has called "vertical structures" in the speech of first language learners. Wagner-Gough (1975) reports a similar strategy in naturalistic L2 acquisition for her subject, Homer.

Teaching Formulaic Speech

In general the formulaic utterances were *picked up* by the three children rather than formally taught. When formal teaching did take place, it was focused on instruction in the correct production of key vocabulary or grammatical items. However, a number of the formulas listed in Figure 3 were actively and successfully taught. Here is an extract from a lesson which contained the first recorded use of "I don't know" by *R* and *T*. It was followed almost immediately by fairly regular use.

T. Now what's that? (T points at a picture of a tree)
R. No sir.
T. Do you know?
Do you know?
What's this?
R. No.
T. No.
T. No. Say "I don't know."
T. I don't know.
T. Do you know?
Do you know?
R. No.
T. I don't know.
R. I don't know.

This may appear fairly authoritarian teaching but it needs to be understood that the attention the teacher gave to modelling "I don't know" constituted a secondary goal. The teacher's main aim was to practice vocabulary. Similarly, on other occasions when formulas were taught, the teacher did not appear to have planned to do so in advance. The instruction resulted from a realisation *as the lesson progressed* that the pupils lacked the appropriate means for expressing discourse functions that were important in classroom communication.

The results of the study of the three children's formulaic speech show that routines, patterns and scripts were used frequently in the classroom context, that they were used to perform communicative functions important to the learners, that later development of formulas such as "I don't know" did occur and that there was some evidence that useful formulas such as "I don't know" could be directly taught when the opportunity offered itself in classroom discourse.

DISCUSSION

Three issues were identified for examination. They were the extent to which formulaic speech occurs in the early speech of ESL learners, the role of formulaic speech in L2 development and the part played by teaching in the classroom use of formulaic speech. I shall discuss each of these issues separately.

Initially the three children investigated in this study used formulaic speech extensively. Indeed, their speech appeared to be entirely composed of single words, routines, patterns and scripts. Also, in many cases the children used the *same* formulas and these appeared in their speech in the same order. The ceremonial formulas (for example "Good morning" and "Thank you"), "finish" and "I don't know" occurred earlier than "This one", "Can I have _____, please?" and "What's this?". However, although the frequency of occurrence of these formulas was high, their range was quite limited. The three learners developed a small number of formulas to meet their basic communicative needs in the classroom. With regard to the role of formulaic speech in the children's L2 development, it is necessary to distinguish between its contributioin to *performance* and *acquisition* (see page 54). This study suggests that in classroom L2 *performance* involving ESL learners, formulaic speech is an important aspect of their communicative abilities. The children needed and therefore learnt a number of formulas for participating in the everyday interactions of classroom life. Thus the formulas that were identified typically related to social aspects of the classroom and to classroom organisation. These aspects of classroom communication were so important to the learners that they acquired a limited set of formulas to compensate for their lack of creative rules for constructing novel sentences. The regularity and frequency of these contexts provided both the motivation and input conditions for acquiring a number of formulaic utterances.

As regards the role of formulaic speech in L2 *acquisition*, the picture is less clear and it is probably not possible to decide whether the formulaic wholes were stripped down and so contributed to the learners' developing rule systems, as claimed by Clark and Fillmore, or whether rule-created speech developed entirely separately, as argued by Krashen and Scarcella. Although considerable development took place in the children's use of "I don't know", it is not clear how much of the grammatical information contained in the routine was unpackaged and made available for productive use. Much of the apparent development could be explained either in terms of additional routines or by the conversion of routines to patterns. If this explanation is correct, little real analysis took place.

Somewhat greater evidence of analysis can be observed in a rather special routine used by *R*. It evolved in collaboration with a Vietnamese boy, whom *R* sat next to for a short period during the first year. The routine consisted of a fixed component "Book in the bin" and the fun consisted of manipulating this in one way

or another in a manner similar to that described by Peck (1978;1980). Here is a representative sample of *R*'s utterances recorded in a single lesson in week 11. In each utterance *R* was playing with language rather than conveying information.

Book in the bin.
You book in the bin.
My book not in the bin.
You in the bin.
No writing in the bin.
You book in the bin.
You bin . . . in the bin, all right?
You writing in the bin.

In the space of a few utterances *R* demonstrated his ability to operate on a routine in a way not dissimilar to the analytical procedures used by a linguist seeking to determine the constituent boundaries in his speech data. *R* substituted, added, deleted and rearranged. Semantic play, as afforded by this routine, appears to involve the kind of analysis which may contribute to the development of the creative rule system.

It may be that the role of formulaic speech in L2 acquisition is a variable phenomenon. That is, under certain conditions and with specific formulas the kind of analysis required to develop creative rules from previously unanalysed units may take place. The contribution of formulaic speech should not be seen in all-or-nothing terms. Also, formulaic speech may contribute to L2 acquisition by helping to start and sustain verbal interactions, thereby providing the learner with the necessary comprehensible input to facilitate growth of the creative rule system.

The final issue concerned whether formulaic speech can be taught. Some evidence was provided to show that this may be both possible and successful. The learners may have responded to direct teaching of routines such as "I don't know" because it provided them with the linguistic means to express functions that were communicatively important in the classroom. The success of this teaching contrasts with the repeated failure to teach the same learners syntactical rules. One speculative explanation for this is that whereas syntax consists of abstract rules that require the learner to focus on form, and is, as a result, not easily taught to children such as *J*, *R* and *T*, formulaic speech is not abstract but meaningful and can be memorized in the form in which it is presented and so can be taught and, in Krashen's terms "learnt". It may be possible to *learn* useful formulas in much the same way as any other useful information.

However, the study of the three children also showed that formulaic speech did not have to be taught to be acquired. Its communicative value together with frequency of use were sufficient for acquisition to take place. It is perhaps more important that ESL teachers are aware of the phenomenon of formulaic speech than that they should attempt direct teaching. This awareness would include recognition that unanlysed wholes are not evidence of the mastery of syntactical rules.

CONCLUSION

Formulaic speech plays a significant part in the L2 performance of ESL learners such as the three children investigated in this study. It enables them to perform a number of important communicative functions in the classroom and it

may contribute, directly or indirectly, to the acquisition of rules for producing novel sentences. In the early stages of L2 development formulaic speech may be more significant than creative rules. In planning ESL programmes for beginners, therefore, teachers might like to think about which formulas will be of most use to their students and look out for opportunities in which they can naturally introduce and practise them.

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